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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Congress passes aid bill

The U.S. Senate and House of Representatives passed a foreign aid bill that includes nearly \$3 billion in aid for Israel.

The \$14.9 billion aid bill passed Wednesday also includes nearly \$2 billion for Egypt, \$225 million for Jordan and approximately \$100 million for the Palestinians.

In another development, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a resolution supporting Israel and condemning Palestinian leaders for the ongoing violence in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The nonbinding measure, which was passed Wednesday by a vote of 365 to 30, condemned Yasser Arafat and other Palestinian leaders for "encouraging the violence and doing so little for so long to stop it, resulting in the senseless loss of life."

Clinton offers to meet leaders

President Clinton said he wants to meet separately with Israeli and Palestinian leaders at the White House, but only if they try to halt the violence in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Clinton spoke by telephone with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat on Tuesday night to offer the meetings.

Hillary returns donation

Hillary Rodham Clinton's Senate campaign returned a \$1,000 donation from a U.S. Muslim leader who has expressed support for Hamas, a campaign spokesman said Wednesday. Abudrahman Alamoudi, of the American Muslim Council, made his donation to Clinton's Senate campaign in May.

In a related development, the New York Daily News reported Wednesday that a U.S. Muslim group whose leader supports use of armed force against Israel by Palestinians raised \$50,000 for Clinton's Senate campaign.

The American Muslim Alliance said it collected the money June 13 at a \$500-a-ticket Boston fund-raiser, where Clinton was presented with a plaque honoring her human rights efforts.

Clinton's campaign confirmed she attended the event but claimed the alliance was not the sponsor, even though the plaque bore the group's name, the newspaper reported.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

U.N. condemnations of Israel further isolate the Jewish state

By Michael J. Jordan

NEW YORK (JTA) — Worldwide denunciations of Israel are piling up, led by an old nemesis, the United Nations.

Recent resolutions of condemnation by three U.N. bodies -- the Security Council, the General Assembly and the Commission on Human Rights -- underscore a vital point, say Jewish observers: how crucial it is for Israel to prevent the "internationalization" of the conflict currently convulsing the Middle East.

Despite positive signals sent out earlier this year with Israel's entry into a U.N. regional grouping and at the U.N. Millennium Summit in early September, especially for Israeli premier Ehud Barak's peacemaking efforts, the international arena continues to be an environment hostile to Israel.

That is why at the Oct. 16 summit in Egypt, where President Clinton tried to broker a cease-fire, Israel rejected the idea of an "international inquiry" into the causes of the outbreak of violence.

Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat pushed for the inquiry to assign blame for the bloodshed.

But such an inquiry and subsequent "internationalization" — bringing in the United Nations — would not only have provided the Palestinians with a sympathetic ally, it would presumably have watered down the role of the United States.

To date, the United States has walked a fine line between being an "honest broker" in peace talks and an open ally to the Jewish state.

At the United Nations, the long, well-documented record of anti-Israel bias stems from the huge voting bloc of Arab and Muslim states.

The bloc, say analysts, has historically used its sheer numbers, and sometimes oil-related and economic blackmail, to bully other U.N. member states into ganging up on Israel.

In its latest moves last week, the bloc flexed its muscles to deal Israel a double whammy.

On Oct. 19, the Geneva-based Commission on Human Rights passed a resolution accusing Israel and its security forces of "war crimes" and "widespread, systematic and gross violations of human rights."

No mention was made of Palestinian actions during the monthlong violence that has rocked the West Bank and Gaza Strip, all but destroying the peace process that was launched in Oslo seven years ago.

The commission's vote was 19 in favor, 16 opposed, with 17 abstentions.

"This sinister resolution reflects hatred, utter moral hypocrisy and blatantly selective standards, while ignoring real human rights abuses on the part of the Palestinians, as well as the real causes of the current violence," said Michael Colson, executive director of the Geneva-based U.N. Watch.

While Colson and others singled out the U.N. high commissioner for human rights, Mary Robinson, for her "balanced assessment of the situation" prior to the vote, they were galled by those who stood in judgment of the Jewish state.

"It was an opportunity for such human rights 'stalwarts' as Cuba, Pakistan and Sudan to give vent to their anti-Israel antagonism," said David Harris, the chairman of U.N. Watch.

"It is laughable to have the commission lectured on Israel's human rights record by

MIDEAST FOCUS

State Dept. issues travel warning

The U.S. State Department warned American citizens to avoid traveling to Israel and the Palestinian territories, citing a "heightened threat of terrorist incidents" in the region. It said Americans already there should exercise caution and avoid shopping malls, public buses and bus stops, as well as crowded areas and any demonstrations.

Report: Arafat, Hamas in alliance

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat has formed a working alliance with Palestinian terrorists, the Washington Post reported Wednesday, quoting a Hamas official. Mahmoud Zahar said steering committees that include Arafat loyalists and terrorist groups have been directing the violence against Israel. Zahar's statement Wednesday undermines Arafat's contention that the Palestinian violence of the past month has been spontaneous.

Russia's role questioned

The leader of armed Palestinian militias in the West Bank questioned whether Russia has any role to play in the Middle East. "You Russians freely gave up your leading role in the world and by that weakened those countries which relied on you and struggled against America," Marwan Barghouti told the Russian daily *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*. His comments came after Russian President Vladimir Putin said he would send an envoy to the region.

Jordanians stage mass protest

Tens of thousands of Jordanians poured into the streets of Amman to denounce the United States and Israel. "To hell with Clinton," "To hell with Barak," they shouted, demanding that Jordan sever its relations with the Jewish state.

Tuesday's mass demonstration took place as President Clinton and Jordan's King Abdullah signed a free-trade agreement at the White House.



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quintessential human rights abusers such as Algeria, Iraq, Iran and Syria."

Last Friday, the diplomatic victory for the Palestinian Authority was even more resounding.

The General Assembly in New York assailed Israel for its "excessive use of force" against Palestinian civilians.

The vote was 92 in favor, 6 opposed. There were 46 abstentions.

Israel's Foreign Ministry responded that the resolution was "totally one-sided and completely ignores numerous incidents" and "ongoing acts of violence on the part of the Palestinians."

It added: "The government of Israel will do all it can to stabilize the situation, and expects the Palestinian leadership to do likewise."

However, as an Israeli diplomat noted, the assembly resolution is "empty rhetoric," as the assembly only has the power "to send faxes, not peacekeepers."

Indeed, while U.N. resolutions go a long way in shaping world opinion, it is Security Council decisions that pack the greatest punch.

The 15-member council has the authority to mandate, for example, a peacekeeping mission, a war crimes tribunal, an embargo — or an international inquiry.

The council's Oct. 7 resolution against Israel noted the disproportionate number of Palestinian victims without mentioning Jewish casualties; condemned Israel's excessive use of force against civilians; omitted the apparent unwillingness of Palestinian leaders to rein in the rioters; and mentioned the Temple Mount only by its Arabic name, Haram As-Sharif.

But to the relief of the Israelis, the resolution did not mandate any specific action against Israel.

The resolution passed by a 14-0 vote, with the United States, controversially, abstaining.

American officials said they abstained because they didn't want to jeopardize their tenuous status as an "honest broker" and because intelligence sources in the Middle East warned that a veto might incite even more violence, even attacks on American embassies and other interests.

Nevertheless, just few days later came what is now described as a terrorist attack on the U.S.S. Cole, in which 17 American sailors were killed.

The United States is still stinging from criticism from pro-Israel supporters over its controversial abstention.

The U.S. ambassador to the U.N., Richard Holbrooke, has vowed to use the American veto if any more motions come before the Security Council.

Observers say U.S. opposition is why the Palestinians turned to other U.N. venues for support. Still, Americans are surprised by the ongoing anti-Israel assaults.

"We had hoped that these kind of senseless and unproductive — one could argue counterproductive — resolutions were a thing of the past," an American official told JTA. "We were wrong."

Holbrooke was also quoted as saying recently, "What you see here in the emotions of the current crisis is some countries trying to bring the U.N. back to its low point" when it passed "resolutions on Zionism that were racist."

In fact, some say these resolutions have the potential to do more than simply damage Israel's image internationally.

"It really strikes me how irresponsible some of these diplomats are, that they shamelessly give so little thought to the implications," said the U.S. official.

"They may be trying to get a rhetorical jab at Israel, but it causes people to die on the ground," the official said, adding that if demonstrators believe that the international community supports their cause, "it could embolden them to continue their struggle. It can do more to fuel the fire than to put out the flames."

While the resolutions may paint a picture of a world against Israel, the Jewish state enjoys far more international support in bilateral relations between envoys, ambassadors and foreign ministers of individual countries, said one Israeli diplomat.

Nevertheless, in the spotlight of the United Nations, the Israeli diplomatic corps is resigned to this sort of ganging up, the diplomat said.

"Basically, since it's not a fair game and will have no direct impact on Israel, it's not something we're losing sleep over," he said.

"It's like the Chicago Bulls playing Yeshiva University." □

JEWISH WORLD

G.A. to focus on Israel

In response to the escalating violence in the Middle East, the Jewish federation system's annual conference in Chicago is making Israel central to the programming. Organizers of the United Jewish Communities' General Assembly, scheduled for Nov. 10-15, are adding a solidarity rally and are "recasting" existing sessions to focus more on the impact of, and appropriate response to, recent events in Israel.

Shoah commemorated in Vienna

Several hundred people attended the unveiling of Austria's first Holocaust memorial. At Wednesday's ceremony in Vienna, Simon Wiesenthal said the monument "honors the dead and at the same time is a loud and persistent condemnation of the Nazis."

Czech named Righteous Gentile

A Czech railway worker who risked his life to rescue a stranger from the Nazis in 1944 was honored posthumously in a ceremony Wednesday at the Israeli Embassy in Prague.

Ladislav Holub, who died in 1980 at the age of 66, took Ruzena Libicka into his home in the Czech village of Pecny after she had spent a year on the run from authorities.

Supremacist nabbed in Queens

A white supremacist in New York was arrested Tuesday for allegedly stockpiling dozens of assault rifles, thousands of rounds of ammunition and piles of racist literature linking him to the National Alliance hate group. Steven McFadden's arrest was the second of a National Alliance member in Queens in the last six months.

According to the Anti-Defamation League, the neo-Nazi group is the "single most dangerous organized hate group" in the United States, with 18 active cells and a reported membership of 1,500.

ADL: U.S. papers back Israel

U.S. newspapers overwhelmingly support Israel in the ongoing clashes with the Palestinians, according to the Anti-Defamation League.

The ADL based its findings on a survey of 67 editorials appearing between Sept. 30 and Oct. 15.

Poet's papers given to Yale

The personal papers and literary archive of Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai have been given to Yale University's Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library in New Haven.

According to Yale, Amichai arranged to donate his papers, which include manuscripts of his poems, correspondence with fellow writers and diaries, weeks before his death.

Father of kidnapped son clings to hope that peace still possible

By Michael J. Jordan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The middle-aged man would be forgiven if he never again wore the silver dove pinned to his lapel.

It's a badge that identifies him as a supporter of Israel's peace movement. In fact, he is a longtime activist.

But this man now has more reason than anyone to be anti-peace: His son was one of three Israeli soldiers kidnapped Oct. 7 by Hezbollah while patrolling the Israel-Lebanon border.

Yet the man has not lost faith.

"I don't think peace is hopeless; even now, we believe in it," says the man, who asked that he not be identified for fear his son's captors might single him out for additional torture.

Details about the captives, their backgrounds and their families have not been reported in the Israeli or international media for the same reason.

This man, who has become the unofficial spokesman for the three families involved, was initially reluctant to even talk to a reporter.

But he consented after he came forward to tell his story to last week's "solidarity mission" of Diaspora Jews, which brought some 80 federation and organizational leaders from across North America and elsewhere to stand with Israel during the current crisis.

He appealed to mission members to return home and exert pressure on their respective governments, to press for the release of the soldiers.

"Your family is our family," said Stephen Solender, the president and chief executive officer of the United Jewish Communities, the umbrella for the federation system, a co-sponsor of the mission.

"Your pain is our pain. Your hope is our hope."

The man's son and his two comrades were abducted into Lebanon by Hezbollah guerrillas while making a routine check of the border fence near the Shabaa Farms enclave, a stone's throw from an outpost of U.N. peacekeepers.

It was an elaborate operation, as Hezbollah reportedly used remote-controlled bombs, shoulder-fired missiles and tear-gas grenades to disorient the Israeli soldiers and force the U.N. peacekeepers to duck back into their post.

To date, Hezbollah has not released any word of their health.

Earlier this month, U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan reportedly tried to negotiate the release of the hostages, apparently without success.

Hezbollah wants Israel to free 19 Lebanese prisoners in return for information on the soldiers and a reserve colonel the group kidnapped last week. Sheik Hassan Nasrallah, the group's leader, told Saudi Arabia's al-Watan newspaper that there has been no serious effort to negotiate the Israelis' release.

The Oct. 14 issue of *The Economist*, a British newsmagazine, quoted Hezbollah sources as saying that the trio's release would come at a steep price.

The magazine says the kidnapers have been contacted by the Palestinians, Jordanians and Syrians, who want Hezbollah to add hundreds more names to a prisoner-exchange list with Israel.

Yuli Tamir, a member of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak's Cabinet, is working closely with the families of the captives.

When JTA asked the man whether Israel should meet the kidnapers' demands, Tamir broke in: "We won't negotiate through the media."

However, she asserted that the fate of the three was also on the shoulders of the international community.

For 22 years, the United Nations demanded Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon, she said. When Israel finally did, in May of this year, Israeli and U.N. officials demarcated the border together.

"We feel the U.N. deluded us to believe that this was a protected border," said Tamir, "and we feel they haven't fulfilled their responsibility." □

Congress approves aid to Israel; move is 'clear message' to world

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — In one of this session's final acts, the U.S. Congress this week demonstrated its support for Israel with words — and money.

Both the Senate and the House of Representatives passed a \$14.9 billion foreign aid bill late Wednesday afternoon, including nearly \$3 billion in aid to Israel.

The moneys include \$1.98 billion in military and \$840 million in economic funds for Israel.

In a separate act, the House passed a resolution blaming Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat for the violence engulfing the Middle East.

The bipartisan resolution, which passed 365-30, condemns the Palestinian leadership for encouraging violence and doing little to stop it, calls upon the Palestinian leadership to refrain from public incitement and urges it to vigorously use its security forces to stop all violence.

The aid to Israel passed in the final version of the foreign spending bill was to be distributed as a lump sum when the U.S. fiscal year starts in October. Since the bill was held up, the aid would presumably be disbursed after it passes.

As part of a plan worked out with Israel to end economic assistance by the year 2009, the military aid was increased \$60 million from last year while the economic aid was decreased by \$120 million.

At the end of the process, military aid to Israel is expected to total \$2.4 billion. Economic aid to Israel, which once amounted to \$1.2 billion annually, will no longer exist.

The foreign aid bill, which passed 307-101 in the House and 65-27 in the Senate, also includes \$1.3 billion for military aid and \$695 million for economic aid to Egypt, \$225 million for Jordan and approximately \$100 million for the Palestinians.

Last-minute efforts in the House to decrease aid to the Palestinians because of the violence in the Middle East failed.

Some lawmakers wanted to cut non-humanitarian aid — about one-third of the \$100 million — to the Palestinians. The aid to Palestinians goes through programs administered by non-governmental organizations monitored by the U.S. Agency for International Development.

Senators are still working on legislation that would block all U.S. aid to the Palestinian Authority if Arafat follows up on his threat to declare a Palestinian state unilaterally. The House already passed a similar bill.

Jewish groups finally breathed a sigh of relief as the aid to Israel was approved. Although the aid package was no longer under direct attack, the road to the bill's passage was a rocky one.

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the pro-Israel lobby, called the aid package to Israel "incredibly significant."

Coming at a "critical time like this," said Kenneth Bricker, AIPAC spokesman, it "sends a clear and unambiguous message to the world. The U.N. can pass as many biased, one-sided resolutions as it wants. The U.S. stands with Israel."

Ever since the planned Israeli sale of an airborne early warning system to China became an issue earlier this year, there had been rumblings in Congress about placing some restrictions on aid.

Rep. Sonny Callahan (R-Ala.), chairman of the appropriations subcommittee on foreign operations, had led the charge for punitive measures against Israel unless it canceled the Phalcon deal, threatening to cut \$250 million from the aid package and arguing against early disbursement of U.S. assistance.

The Clinton administration voiced its concerns over the deal a number of times but said linking the issue to U.S. aid was inappropriate.

Israel ultimately canceled the deal with China.

Last year, the annual aid to Israel also came under fire, and Jewish organizations had to fight for \$1.8 billion in special funding for the Wye agreement between Israel and the Palestinians.

The foreign aid bill had been held up over debt relief for Third World countries and a ban on U.S. aid for overseas family planning groups that advocate or participate in abortions. Compromises were reached on both issues. □

California Holocaust fund may finally be established

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES (JTA) -- Establishment of a \$4.2 million humanitarian fund to aid needy Holocaust survivors in California has been delayed by bureaucratic snafus for almost a year, but there are strong hopes that the fund will finally be in operation by the end of the year.

An agreement by three Dutch insurance companies to pay out the \$4.2 million was triumphantly announced by then California Insurance Commissioner Chuck Quackenbush on Nov. 30 last year, but as of now, the money is still sitting in Holland.

The reason, California officials and the insurance companies agree, is that Quackenbush never asked for the money or set up a mechanism for administering it.

Five months after Quackenbush's November announcement, he became enmeshed in a legislative inquiry on charges that he allowed California insurers to avoid billions of dollars in fines stemming from mishandled earthquake damage claims, in return for much smaller donations to nonprofit funds set up by Quackenbush.

Because of the investigation, Quackenbush said last May, he held back from setting up a fund to receive and administer the Dutch money. He resigned under a cloud of suspicion shortly after the hearings ended.

However, state auditor Elaine Howle said in a report last week and in an interview Monday that there is no explanation why no effort was made to collect the money during the five months elapsing between the agreement with the Dutch companies and the start of the legislative hearings.

Howle said she has no answer to that question and neither has Steven Green, chief counsel and deputy insurance commissioner, who came on board after Quackenbush's resignation.

However, Green said he is working with state Attorney General Bill Lockyer to set up a foundation, outside of the Insurance Department, that will meet the legal requirements for administering and distributing the Dutch money.

The fund's board of directors "will have input" from the California Holocaust Insurance Settlement Alliance, consisting of 33 Jewish organizations and individuals and set up by Quackenbush. □